

Build a Successful Career Journey Using a Professional Development Plan

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



Building a successful career journey is no easy task. Our careers ebb and flow. Sometimes we experience massive success, and sometimes we fail miserably. So how do we take over the reins of what could become a run-away horse having its own sense of direction and destination? None of us would be satisfied with a horse taking us to places we don't want to be, or charging back to the barn, like one did to my husband. It did not want to leave its comfort zone. It's up to us, as the rider of the horse, to determine where we're going and how we want to get there. We need to plan for a successful journey.

The best way to craft a successful career journey is to create your own personalized, professional development plan. Such a plan helps you control your destiny so that at the end of your journey there are few regrets and less excuses about what could have been. No journey comes without some unexpected bumps in the road, so you also want to create opportunities for redemption if things go awry.

To continue to grow and thrive in your career, create measurable goals that are challenging but not out of reach and can be modified if situations take an unexpected turn. This will provide a satisfactory level of control over what you are doing and provide a feeling of competence in how you are performing.

Here are 4 ways to grow in your career.

Follow your own North Star

Set sights and support actions on your own personal North Star. Stephen Covey describes this "True North" as an individual's guiding moral principle. Understanding your true north helps you to use your values in developing your life and your career. A key concept to keep in mind is "authenticity." No matter what, being your authentic self is non-negotiable. Taking an accounting of your core values that need to be embraced in whatever career move you make will allow you to remain grounded. Following your North Star guarantees your moving in the right direction.

Look for opportunities through networking.

An important part of any professional development plan is understanding the changing trends in the business community. In your present job, or previous jobs, you have developed certain competent skills, knowledge and abilities. Some of these SKA's you may prefer using more frequently. Through networking, you can keep abreast of what is available in the business community in which you can utilize those SKA's. Again, be honest with yourself when making choices in your career journey. With new job opportunities, carefully consider if this allows you to grow and enhance your skill set. It will be an uncomfortable feeling if you make a career choice only to find that you are not employing the skill sets you hope to enhance, and instead, find yourself in an unrewarding situation.

Look for strategic ways to improve the work process.

Always look to do things better. How can you improve your work process? Becoming more efficient and more competent in your skill sets is useful as you move up the corporate ladder, change jobs, or start your own business. There are two aspects of business: strategy about what direction to take, and operational effectiveness on how to get there. Any time-saving measures you can institute in the operational process will be beneficial to the bottom line.

Read

I can't stress this enough. Read. Read news articles, fiction, sci-fi, adventure, romantic comedy, whatever. Just read! Nourish the brain and the imagination. It helps you grow. It opens the mind to new possibilities. It provides new perspectives for solving problems or connecting disparate information in new creative ways. Reading is a foundation for expanding your knowledge base.

Here are 5 tips for creating an effective professional development plan.

As you journey, guided by your North Star, create a process of continual improvement

You need to determine what types of skills, knowledge and abilities are warranted to improve and/or acquire along your career journey. Choose them so that you increase personal fulfillment at work and also, will move you closer to your long-term career goals.

Expand Your Reach.

In order to grow, you need to step outside of your comfort level and begin to make changes that might seem uncomfortable when you first start. By being objective about your limitations and weaknesses, you can choose which skills realistically to improve and help you bolster your job performance.

Create your goals by identifying what you want

The purpose of a goal is to achieve it. So look over your job description, and identify those activities you enjoy and would like to enhance. Consider what long-term dreams you are trying to achieve and begin creating goals that can set you on a forward path. We help our clients develop SMART Goals, goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time sensitive. We use goals as guidelines for establishing a target worth achieving and an action plan on how to accomplish it.

Develop a strong bias for action

No goal will be achieved without action. You need to be willing to show discipline, dedication, perseverance and a commitment to excellence. Procrastination is the downfall of accomplishing your target goals. By actively engaging in your professional development plan, you prove to yourself that you are worth the effort.

Trust your instincts

If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Establishing a professional development plan that pleases others but not you, will not produce quality results. You must buy into the program and have a comfort level that what you are trying to improve is really of value to you.



Actually, we never stop growing and we never stop learning. Our lives are a continuing narrative that evolves over time. The experiences that have shaped us, and the challenges that have tested us, define the story we tell about ourselves. A professional development plan becomes part of the script in creating your happy ending.

About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business success expert. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. She is frequently featured in the media and contributes blog posts for www.AllBusiness.com and www.WomenOnBusiness.com. Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.